



31st MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT PRESS RELEASE



31ST MEU HEADED FOR JAPAN COASTLINE

PHILIPPINE SEA – The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, embarked aboard three ships of Amphibious Squadron 11, is heading towards the coast of mainland Japan and is expected to arrive March 16 in support of Operation Tomodachi, after a major earthquake and following tsunami Friday.

The movement of forces to Japan is intended to provide logistical support to the Japan Self-Defense Force at their request in wake of the 8.9 magnitude earthquake, which caused widespread destruction.

“Our thoughts and prayers go out to our close friends and allies in Japan during this difficult time,” said Col. Andrew MacMannis, commanding officer, 31st MEU. “We are repositioning to be ready to support to our Japanese partners. Our support will compliment the services that the Government of Japan is already providing. We stand ready to help our partners in need as they work tirelessly to respond to this evolving crisis.”

With the JSDF leading Operation Tomodachi, U.S. Department of Defense assets are to provide search-and-rescue provisions, medical services, food, shelter, command and control, fuel and other capabilities.

The 31st MEU and Amphibious Squadron 11 were planning for a disaster relief exercise when news of the actual disaster was received.

The amphibious dock landing ship USS Harpers Ferry (LSD 49) with elements of the 31st MEU aboard, which had been scheduled to participate in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise March 14-18 in Indonesia, was redirected to Japan upon news of the scope of the damage. The exercise was scheduled to involve multi-lateral disaster planning and exercises, including the nation of Japan.

The amphibious dock landing ship USS Germantown (LSD 42), also with service members and equipment of the 31st MEU aboard, was directed to head for Japan from Southeast Asian waters as well.

The amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2), with the majority of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit embarked, had recently arrived in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia for a port visit when the tsunami struck Japan. The crew and service members were recalled to the ship upon notification of the earthquake and tsunami, and the Essex got underway March 12, transiting to Japan.

“The U.S.-Japan Alliance, which spans more than 50 years, is strong and will continue to deepen throughout our continued engagement and support of one another,” said Capt. Bradley Lee, commander, PHIBRON 11. “Japan is a longstanding, critical ally in the region, and our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Japan during this very difficult, tragic time.”

Helicopters and C-130 aircraft of III Marine Expeditionary Force have already been sent to the affected region, with additional equipment to follow, and planning continues to be ready to respond when tasked.

The earthquake hit Japan off the eastern coast of Honshu at 2:46 p.m. The earthquake was measured at magnitude 8.9 by the U.S. Geological Survey, and struck at a depth of approximately 24km. This is the largest recorded earthquake to hit Japan, and the fifth largest on record world-wide. The earthquake triggered a following tsunami which swept the coastline up to six miles inland with waves as high as 32 feet.

“As long time allies, U.S. and Japan forces are extremely interoperable,” said MacMannis. “The 31st MEU participated in training with the Japanese Self Defense Forces as recently as last month.”

At the Cobra Gold exercise in February, the 31st MEU practiced evacuation and humanitarian aid scenarios. Forces of the 31st MEU also participated in the JSDF exercise Forest Light, a bilateral training event designed to enhance interoperability in Kyushu, Japan in December 2010.

“Disaster relief efforts are always organized by civilian leadership, and the military’s logistics capabilities – the ability to move supplies and people by air, ground and sea – makes us an ideal response team to support those efforts,” said Lt. Col. William

Arick, commanding officer, Combat Logistics Battalion 31, 31st MEU. “The 31st MEU’s purpose in disaster relief is to alleviate human suffering and prevent the loss of life by rapidly delivering critical capabilities.”

The 31st MEU and PHIBRON 11 team has responded to four humanitarian assistance disaster relief situations in the last two years alone. The organization is prepared to deliver robust air, ground, and maritime transportation; medical and dental health services; distribution services; and engineering assets as directed.

The 31st MEU includes more than 2,200 Marines and Sailors and is comprised of four elements: the Command Element; Battalion Landing Team 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines; Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 262 (Reinforced) and CLB-31.

The 31st MEU provides a forward-deployed, flexible, sea-based force capable of conducting amphibious operations, crisis response and limited contingency operations.

The 31st MEU is the only continually forward-deployed MEU, and remains the nation’s force-in-readiness in the Asia-Pacific region.